



# 2009–2013



## Phoenix Drug Kingpin Sentenced to 20 Years for Directing Criminal Enterprise

In January 2009, DEA's Phoenix Field Division and the U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona announced that drug kingpin Martin Angel Gonzalez, 43, was sentenced to 20 years in prison for operating a large drug trafficking ring out of Phoenix. U.S. District Court Judge Stephen M. McNamee also imposed a \$10 million monetary judgment against Gonzalez, who pled guilty to multiple serious drug trafficking offenses as part of a 70-count superseding indictment related to his leadership of a 12-year conspiracy involving the distribution of over 30,000 kilograms of marijuana worth more than \$33 million. Twenty-five other co-conspirators were also charged and pled guilty for their involvement in the conspiracy.

During the investigation, agents seized approximately 5,000 pounds of marijuana and more than \$15 million in assets, including cash, investment accounts, bank accounts, vehicles, jewelry, and real estate properties. Gonzalez's organization imported marijuana from Mexico, packaged it in the Phoenix area, and distributed it to associates in eight different states, using commercial trucks, cars, and commercial shipping companies. Gonzalez was arrested in Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico, with the assistance of Mexican federal law enforcement. He was extradited from Mexico in 2006.

## Extradition of Miguel Caro-Quintero (2009)

Miguel Caro-Quintero took control of the family drug trafficking organization (DTO) responsible for trafficking multi-ton quantities of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana into the United States after the arrest and imprisonment of his brother, Rafael Caro-Quintero, who previously led the organization. Rafael was released from prison in 2013, then re-arrested in July 2022. Miguel "El Padrino" Ángel Félix-Gallardo and Rafael were the masterminds behind the kidnapping, torture, and murder of DEA Special Agent Enrique Camarena in 1985. Miguel Caro-Quintero was extradited from Mexico on February 25, 2009.

## Federal and Local Law Enforcement Working Together in Connecticut

DEA's Bridgeport, Connecticut, Resident Office (BRO) received a call from the Danbury Police Department following the discovery of Edward Rivera's body in a remote area of Danbury in February 2009. BRO responded to Danbury and assisted with the investigation. The investigation by DEA, the Danbury Police Department, and the U.S. Marshals Service discovered



Miguel Caro-Quintero.

that Rivera had been kidnapped from his Bronx, New York, address, robbed of 68 pounds of marijuana, murdered, and driven 60 miles to Danbury, where his body was dumped in a wooded area. The vehicle that transported Rivera was found at a salvage yard in the Bronx.

On March 1, 2009, the stolen marijuana was recovered in a wall trap in the bedroom of defendant Andrew Zayac, who was later convicted of the murder, kidnapping, and robbery of Rivera in federal court. Zayac's co-defendant, Heriberto Gonzalez, was convicted on drug charges, tampering with evidence, and obstruction of justice. From phone records, a connection was made to a marijuana and steroid trafficking group in Danbury. A Title III investigation was initiated with ties to the Bonnano Organized Crime Family and the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club. The operation resulted in 12 federal arrests and the seizure of 200 pounds of marijuana, large quantities of steroids, and cash, vehicles, and real property totaling \$750,000.00.

## United States Reaches \$1 Million Settlement with Kino Hospital in Tucson

DEA's Tucson District Office announced a settlement with Kino Hospital in March 2009 stemming from an audit and investigation conducted after doses of controlled substances from the hospital were discovered missing in early 2004. Kino Hospital committed \$1,000,000 over five years to establish a three-pronged drug misuse prevention initiative to benefit the Tucson area community.

One part of the campaign was designed to educate parents and teachers of teenage students in southern Arizona on the signs associated with prescription drug misuse. The Pima County Department of Health developed and implemented the campaign in southern Arizona middle schools and high schools. The second initiative, financed by Pima County, developed and operated an arrestee drug usage data collection program, which allowed the county to provide data to aid in assessing the viability of treatment efforts, law enforcement tactics, and general crime analysis. The final of the three programs was for the development and operation of a drug treatment program in the Pima County jail system, providing immediate access to drug treatment for Pima County inmates on a voluntary basis.

## Operation Blade Runner (2009)

A traffic stop conducted by the Utah Highway Patrol in Salt Lake City in February 2009 resulted in the seizure of 83 kilograms of cocaine. Law enforcement determined the cocaine was destined for eastern Washington, where it was to be loaded onto a helicopter in exchange for a load of B.C. bud (a particularly potent strain of Canadian-grown marijuana). When the helicopter touched down outside of Lone, Washington, DEA was waiting. Samuel Lindsey-Brown, 24, of Revelstoke, British Columbia, was arrested after he attempted to off-load 12 large duffel bags containing 426 pounds of marijuana. During the course of the investigation, a DEA special agent working undercover infiltrated the organization and arranged to receive 300 pounds of B.C. bud and to deliver 20 kilograms of cocaine to be smuggled into Canada.



Operation Blade Runner.

On March 5, 2009, the group attempted the exchange with the undercover agent using a helicopter in North Idaho. A Kelowna, British Columbia, man landed the helicopter in Northern Idaho and was arrested after unloading 174 pounds of B.C. bud.

Through information sharing between the United States and Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) identified the landing site in Canada. RCMP arrested two men from Chilliwack and seized 150 pounds of marijuana and approximately 40,000 ecstasy pills. Additional search warrants served in Nelson, Salmon Arm, and Malakwa, British Columbia, resulted in the seizure of six guns and two arrests. Together, DEA and RCMP arrested 9 subjects and seized over 750 pounds of marijuana, over 80 kilograms of cocaine, 6 weapons, and 2 helicopters.

### 4-Star General Accompanies DEA

In March 2009, General David McKiernan, the U.S. Commander of all NATO and U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, accompanied DEA agents on a search warrant execution near Jalalabad, Afghanistan. General McKiernan was the first four-star general to accompany DEA agents in the field in Afghanistan. DEA FAST and DEA Kabul Country Office agents executed the operation and seized 900 kilograms of morphine. General McKiernan became a friend of DEA in Afghanistan and was instrumental in providing military assistance for the agency's operations.



General David McKiernan (left) with DEA ASAC Selby Smith, who organized General McKiernan's participation on this operation.

### DEA Aids Colombians Against FARC

In June 2009, DEA's Bogota Country Office Narcoterrorism Group began assisting the Cuerpo Tecnico de Investigaciones (CTI), the Colombian judicial investigative branch, and the Colombian Army in their manhunt to capture indicted FARC Supreme Commander Guillermo Leon Saenz Vargas (AKA Alfonso Cano). Though he had been a DEA target for some time, it was Cano's 2009 rise to the supreme leadership position that made him DEA's number one FARC target.

For two years, DEA and other U.S. Government agencies, along with elements of Colombian Military Intelligence, Colombian Army Special Forces, CTI, and CNP pursued Alfonso Cano in a sustained series of intelligence-driven military offensives. Dubbed Operation Odyssey, they were designed to systematically attack Cano's security and logistical support, pushing him out of his traditional operating zone. In the early morning of November 4, 2011, the Colombian Air Force bombed Cano's hideout while hundreds of elite Colombian Army Special Forces troops descended from helicopters to surround the mountainside fortress. Cano was killed in action attempting to sneak through the security perimeter under cover of darkness dressed in civilian clothes. This event marks the first time in Colombia the FARC Supreme Commander had been killed.

### Physician Accused of Multiple Crimes in Massive Prescription Drug Case

In July 2009, DEA's Phoenix Field Division and the Arizona Attorney General's Office announced the filing of felony charges and the Maricopa County Superior Court's issuance of a \$10 million seizure warrant against a Nevada doctor who allegedly wrote illegal drug prescriptions for patients at a clinic he operated in Mohave County. He also allegedly collected \$3.5 million in fraudulent insurance claims, including \$2.5 million from the State of Arizona.

The 14 felony counts against Dr. Albert Szu Sun Yeh, 44, of Las Vegas, included conspiracy, assisting a criminal syndicate, money laundering, and improperly administering narcotic drugs. In a separate indictment, seven felony counts were filed against Dr. Yeh's physician assistant, Bryan V. Espinosa, 54, of Henderson, Nevada.

Dr. Yeh, who was licensed to practice in both Nevada and Arizona, maintained a practice in Las Vegas and saw Arizona patients only on Tuesdays at his Pain Wellness Center in Golden Valley, a town with a population of about 5,000 near Kingman, Arizona. He would typically write more than 100 prescriptions each Tuesday the center was open. The warrant served during the operation led to the seizure of \$3.9 million in multiple bank accounts,

investment accounts, real estate, and other property belonging to Dr. Yeh.

### DEA Loses Three Heroes in the Line of Duty

On October 26, 2009, three DEA special agents and seven U.S. military service members were tragically killed following a joint counternarcotics operation in western Afghanistan. Early that morning, DEA special agents, U.S. Special Forces, and Afghan military counterparts executed Afghan search warrants at a bazaar in the rugged Badghis province. The market was a safe haven for insurgents and contained significant quantities of narcotics, improvised explosive devices, and weapons used against U.S.-led coalition forces. The operation supported the Afghan government's rule of law efforts to disrupt material support for the Taliban from local drug traffickers.

After the successful operation (which included an hour-long firefight with insurgents), the DEA agents, U.S. military personnel, and Afghan counterparts were departing the target area on a U.S. military helicopter when it crashed, killing Special Agent Michael E. Weston, Special Agent Forrest N. Leamon, Special Agent Chad L. Michael, and seven U.S. Special Forces personnel. Leamon and Michael were both FAST members and Weston was assigned to DEA's Kabul Country Office.

The crash also injured 26 other personnel, including DEA Group Supervisor Patrick McDarby. Despite receiving numerous injuries, he continued to help extract injured personnel from the crashed helicopter. All of the injured and deceased were recovered and returned to base.

### Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force Strike Force Opens in Phoenix

On October 1, 2009, Deputy Attorney General David W. Ogden, along with U.S. Attorney Dennis K. Burke, Acting Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Kenneth Melson, DEA Deputy Chief of Operations Dave Gaddis, and other federal and local officials unveiled the new OCDETF Strike Force site in Phoenix, Arizona.



DEA remembers three fallen agents in Afghanistan.

## DEA Reopens Country Office in Uzbekistan

Given the need to address the Afghan drug trade and Uzbekistan's increased efforts to address counternarcotic issues, the government of Uzbekistan accredited DEA special agents to the U.S. Mission in Tashkent, and in October 2009, DEA formally reopened the Tashkent Country Office.

In recognition of this new era of bilateral cooperation, then DEA Assistant Administrator and Chief of Intelligence Anthony Placido traveled to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, to attend meetings with high-ranking Uzbek officials. Afterward, U.S. Ambassador Richard Norland held a reception in honor of Mr. Placido's visit. Distinguished Uzbek guests included the Chairman of the National Security Service, the Minister of the Interior, the Chairman of the State Customs Committee, the General Prosecutor, and the first Deputy Foreign Minister.

## Operation Medicine Cabinet New Jersey

Over 9,000 pounds of medicine, with a street value of over \$35 million, was collected during Operation Medicine Cabinet New Jersey in November 2009. This was a first in the statewide day of disposal of unused, unwanted, and

expired medicine, spearheaded by DEA's New Jersey Field Division and the Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey with support from many other local and statewide prevention and enforcement organizations. More than 440 local police departments and sheriff departments across all of New Jersey's 21 counties hosted collection sites, where New Jersey residents came out in force to rid their homes of unused, unwanted, and expired medicines.

Operation Medicine Cabinet New Jersey accomplished two goals—first and foremost, it generated unprecedented attention to the issue of prescription and over-the-counter medicine misuse and, secondly, it caused tens of thousands of New Jersey residents to look at their medicine cabinets as a potential source for young people to access highly addictive and potentially deadly drugs. Operation Medicine Cabinet New Jersey evolved into the nationwide Prescription Drug Take Back Day Initiative.

## Prescription Drug Diversion Investigation of Stephen Compton

In 2009, the DEA Oklahoma City Diversion Group received intelligence about oxycodone trafficking in Norman, Oklahoma. A prominent businessman, Stephan Compton, his wife, their three sons, and others were involved in the

trafficking activities. In October 2009, a wire intercept was initiated on two of the Compton's cellular telephone lines.

As part of the scheme, the Comptons used others to acquire oxycodone tablets through scheduled doctor appointments where prescriptions were obtained. The individuals were paid by the Comptons in exchange for the oxycodone tablets and were even driven to their doctors' appointments and pharmacies to fill the prescriptions. Once obtained, the oxycodone tablets were stored at various locations in Norman and Noble, Oklahoma.

In December 2009, six search warrants were executed and 42 individuals were arrested in a coordinated take-down of the Compton's illegal pill distribution organization. As a result of the enforcement action, another investigation into the physicians who supplied the Compton organization was immediately initiated. In March 2012, in the U.S. District Court, Western District of Oklahoma, one of the main source physicians, Amar N. Bhandary, was indicted on 53 counts of knowingly and intentionally distributing and dispensing controlled substances. On April 26, 2012, Bhandary was arrested in Frankfurt, Germany, by German authorities.

## DEA Detroit Arrests Adarus Mazio Black

In December 2009, DEA's Detroit Field Division Task Force Group Eight concluded a five-year complex drug homicide investigation into Adarus Mazio Black. The investigation began in August 2004 after the bodies of two Mexican drug traffickers were found in a Detroit back alley. It was later determined the Mexican drug traffickers were killed at the direction of Black after he became aware they were attempting to establish a competing cocaine and marijuana distribution network in Detroit. In March 2005, Group Eight linked Black to the murder of a federal government witness who was preparing to testify against Detroit-based drug dealers, including Black. The federal witness was shot in the head at point-blank range as he left his luxury car rental business. In May 2007, Group Eight linked Black to the brutal slaying of two charter bus drivers who were murdered before they could cooperate and speak about their

involvement in the seizure of \$4.2 million in bulk currency linked to Black. The bus drivers were shot multiple times in the head after they were lured back to Detroit.

Group Eight built a drug conspiracy and a continuing criminal enterprise case against Black. On May 29, 2009, Black was convicted of conspiracy to distribute cocaine, conspiracy to distribute marijuana, continuing a criminal enterprise, escape, and obstruction of justice. On December 14, 2009, Black was sentenced to life in prison.

## They're Guilty: Memphis Resident Office Concludes Racketeering Investigation

Craig Petties, the head of a major DTO based in Memphis, Tennessee, was supplied with cocaine by CPOT Arturo Beltrán-Leyva and his associate, Edgar "La Barbie" Valdez. The Petties DTO was responsible for at least five homicides and the importation of thousands of kilograms of cocaine over several years. It was widely regarded as the largest cocaine source of supply in the Memphis area. This violent organization was a major criminal enterprise with activities ranging from purchasing cocaine from CPOT targets in Mexico, to street-level trafficking in Memphis and elsewhere. Due to their connections with the Sinaloa Cartel, the prices the Petties organization paid for cocaine were far below the amount paid by other groups in Memphis. This organization also provided weapons to the Beltrán-Leyva organization in Mexico.

In January 2008, Petties was arrested in Queretaro, Mexico, by the Mexican military. All of the significant members of this group were indicted in U.S. District Court in Memphis, with six members indicted in a RICO case. In December 2009, Petties pled guilty to an indictment that included the RICO charge, five counts of violent crime in aid of racketeering activity, and to several drug and money laundering charges. All members of the Petties DTO pled guilty or were found guilty on various federal charges in the Western District of Tennessee.

## Project Coronado

In October 2009, DEA announced the successful



On January 18, 2008, CPOT Craig Petties (left) arrived in Memphis via DEA aircraft, escorted by Memphis RO TFO Therman Richardson (right).

culmination of Project Coronado, a 44-month multiagency law enforcement investigation targeting the La Familia Michoacana drug cartel. The effort was the largest single U.S. strike against Mexican drug cartels to date. Over two days, 303 individuals in 19 states were arrested in a series of takedowns by federal, state, and local law enforcement. More than 3,000 agents and officers made arrests during the two-day takedown; 62 kilograms of cocaine, 729 pounds of methamphetamine, 967 pounds of marijuana, 144 weapons, 109 vehicles, and 2 clandestine drug labs were seized.

In total, Project Coronado led to more than 1,180 arrests and the seizure of approximately \$33 million in U.S. currency, 1,999 kilograms of cocaine, 2,730 pounds of methamphetamine, 29 pounds of heroin, 16,390 pounds of marijuana, 389 weapons, 269 vehicles, and 2 clandestine drug labs. Then DEA Acting Administrator Michele M. Leonhart said, “This organization, La Familia, the newest of Mexican cartels, is directly responsible for a vast majority of the methamphetamine pouring into our country across our Southwest Border, and has had a hand in fueling the cycle of violence that is wracking Mexico today.”

## Operation Heavy Cargo

DEA Operation Heavy Cargo, targeting a DTO using commercial aircraft to transport cocaine to the United States, concluded in September 2009. This DTO began operating around 1999 and was responsible for smuggling over \$19 million worth of cocaine into the United States. The operation revealed that corrupt employees of American Airlines would ensure suitcases loaded with kilograms of cocaine were smuggled onto American Airlines aircraft and transported to different cities in the United States. Twenty-three airline employees were arrested in Puerto Rico and Miami, with \$18 million in property seized throughout Puerto Rico.

## Operation Xcellerator

Operation Xcellerator, which culminated in February 2009, targeted the very violent Sinaloa drug cartel, leading to the arrest of more than 750 individuals on narcotics-related charges. More than 23 tons of narcotics were seized as part of this 21-month multiagency law enforcement investigation. Individuals indicted in the operation were charged with various crimes, including engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise by violating several of the CSA's felony

provisions, conspiracy to import controlled substances, money laundering, and possession of unregistered firearms.

Operation Xcellerator led to the arrest of 755 individuals and the seizure of approximately \$59.1 million in U.S. currency, more than 12,000 kilograms of cocaine, more than 16,000 pounds of marijuana, more than 1,200 pounds of methamphetamine, more than 8 kilograms of heroin, approximately 1.3 million pills of ecstasy, more than \$6.5 million in other assets, 149 vehicles, 3 aircraft, 3 maritime vessels, and 169 weapons.

### Global Operation Targets Illegal Importation of Pharmaceuticals

In November 2009, DEA, along with the National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center (part of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement), coordinated agents and officers from DEA, ICE, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, FDA, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and arrested numerous suspects involved in the internet sale of counterfeit and illicit medicines. Agents and officers targeted over 7,000 suspect packages at international mail centers resulting in 724 packages being detained for further examination and seizure. In addition to these examinations, FDA issued 22 warning letters about illegal activity occurring on 136 independent websites, causing the majority of the websites to shut down.

### DEA Announces Arrest of Top La Familia Cartel Member

On August 3, 2009, DEA announced the arrest of Miguel Angel Berraza Villa, a key member of La Familia Michoacana, one of Mexico's most ruthless and violent drug cartels. Mexican police had detained Berraza (AKA La Troca) and Salomon Figueroa-Harrison, a cartel associate, in Apatzingán, Michoacán, Mexico.

La Troca was identified as a significant meth trafficker based in Apatzingán. DEA and Mexican law enforcement officials had identified him as the individual who took over the cartel duties after Arnoldo Rueda Medina (AKA La Minsa) was arrested in late July by the Secretaría de Seguridad Pública.

### New Rules Governing Internet Pharmacies Go into Effect

In April 2009, DEA released new regulations implementing the Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008. These regulations helped prevent the illegal diversion of powerful controlled substances via the internet. The Ryan Haight Act, named for an 18-year-old who died after overdosing on a prescription painkiller he obtained online from a medical doctor he never saw, was enacted on October 15, 2008, through the joint efforts of his mother, Francine Haight, and members of Congress, with DEA support.

The statute amended the CSA by adding several new provisions:

- new definitions, such as “online pharmacy” and “deliver, distribute, or dispense by means of the Internet”;
- a requirement of at least one face-to-face patient medical evaluation prior to issuance of a controlled substance prescription;
- registration requirements for online pharmacies;
- internet pharmacy website disclosure information requirements; and
- prescription reporting requirements for online pharmacies.

### Associate of International Arms Dealer Monzer Al Kassar Found Guilty

On March 18, 2009, Tareq Mousa Al Ghazi, 62, an associate of international arms dealer Monzer Al Kassar, was found guilty of charges relating to a conspiracy to sell millions of dollars' worth of weapons to FARC that would be used to kill U.S. officers and employees in Colombia.

Between February 2006 and June 2007, Al Ghazi and Al Kassar agreed to sell thousands of machine guns, millions of rounds of ammunition, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, and surface-to-air missile systems to FARC. During a series of recorded telephone calls, emails, and in-person meetings, Al Ghazi and Al Kassar agreed to sell

the weapons to two individuals who were confidential sources working with DEA. The confidential sources represented that they were acquiring these weapons for FARC to use in attacks directed at U.S. helicopters in Colombia.

### DEA Launches New Educational Website for Parents

In February 2009, DEA launched a new educational website for parents, [www.GetSmartAboutDrugs.com](http://www.GetSmartAboutDrugs.com). The website was developed as a resource to help parents and caregivers identify illicit drug use, prevent children from using illicit drugs, and locate resources for substance misuse prevention. The site was designed to speak to parents and caregivers of middle school, high school, and college-age children in an informative and non-technical manner.

Acting Administrator Leonhart stated, “DEA wants to share our knowledge about drugs with parents, teachers, and all those who care about keeping our children safe. In this fight, information is power, and DEA’s new website has current, accurate, and practical information about how to spot signs of abuse, identify drugs and paraphernalia, and how to talk to teens about drugs. With just a few clicks parents will be confident and ready to help their kids resist drugs.”

### DEA Chiefs of Intelligence Testify on Capitol Hill

During their tenures, DEA Chiefs of Intelligence Anthony Placido and Rodney Benson had many opportunities to testify before Congress, highlighting that DEA intelligence has been relied upon by lawmakers in combatting both domestic and foreign law enforcement issues. Two of the many examples of being called on to testify included testimony by Chief of Intelligence Placido on March 17, 2009, regarding “Law Enforcement Responses to Mexican Drug Cartels,” as well as testimony by Chief of Intelligence Benson on October 4, 2010, regarding “Is Merida Antiquated? Part Two: Updating U.S. Policy to Counter Threats of Insurgency and Narco-Terrorism.”

### Operation Vaqueros (2010)

On April 27, 2010, DEA’s Sierra Vista Resident Office along with other federal, state, and local officials announced arrests and charges against a Mexican DTO responsible for moving at least 40,000 pounds of marijuana through southern Arizona. The DTO employed advanced counter-surveillance, ramp trucks to overcome vehicle barriers at the border, and hidden vehicle compartments.



DEA Chiefs of Intelligence.





Illicit drug concealment methods.

Seven federal wiretaps approved in the OCDETF investigation, dubbed Operation Vaqueros, for the cowboy attire worn by the DTO's members, were unsealed by order of the U.S. District Court. Twelve people were indicted on federal conspiracy charges. In the course of the investigation, 26 people were indicted on federal charges and 13 on state charges.

The 36-month investigation yielded 39 state and federal indictments and 34 arrests, including one employee of the Cochise County Attorney's Office who was arrested on state charges for providing confidential information to one of the drug traffickers in exchange for money. The remaining 27 defendants were load drivers for the trafficking organization and were prosecuted for drug trafficking charges in federal and state courts.

### **Baltimore's Black Guerilla Family**

Between April 2008 and July 2010, members of DEA's Baltimore District Office Group 57, the office's Special Investigations Group, joined with the Baltimore Police Department, the Maryland Division of Corrections, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Maryland, and the Baltimore City Attorney's Office to target a violent nationwide prison gang known as the Black Guerilla Family (BGF). BGF's criminal activity included narcotics trafficking, robbery, extortion, bribery, retaliation against an informant, money laundering, and commercial robbery. BGF members used violence and threats of violence to coerce incarcerated persons to pay protection money, to enforce the BGF code of conduct, and to increase their control of the Baltimore City drug trade and the underground "prison economy" throughout Maryland correctional facilities.

Group 57 linked the drug trafficking activity of this violent prison gang to the international CPOT organization of Beltrán-Leyva during DEA's Operation Xcellerator. A total of 24 phones were intercepted throughout all three phases of the Title III investigation. The investigators and intelligence analysts supporting the investigation uncovered an emerging money laundering technique when BGF members used Greendot prepaid debit cards to launder the proceeds of their illegal activities.

The case netted 47 federal/state arrests and the seizure of more than 43 kilograms of cocaine, a kilogram of heroin, cash, assets, firearms, and ballistic vests. Working with the Maryland Division of Corrections, cellular telephones, weapons, and a variety of narcotics and prison contraband were confiscated. Group 57 identified and arrested several corrupt prison employees who worked directly with BGF.

### **Operation Tormenta del Manglar (2010)**

On July 2, 2010, DEA's Quito Country Office and the Ecuadorian National Police Sensitive Investigative Unit (SIU) coordinated a search operation in the San Lorenzo, Ecuador, area to locate a fully submersible vessel under construction in a remote mangrove swamp ("manglar" in Spanish) region between San Lorenzo, Ecuador, and the Ecuador-Colombia border. The search resulted in the seizure of a 74-foot-long camouflaged, painted, fully functioning submarine. This effort was dubbed Operation Tormenta del Manglar by the Ecuadorian National Police SIU and was the first seizure of a clandestinely constructed, fully operational submarine built to facilitate drug trafficking.

The "Hunt for Red October," as it was called by special agents in the Quito Country Office, had begun in early 2010 when DEA's Cartagena Resident Office provided information to the Quito Country Office about a Colombian DTO constructing a submarine. It was believed the submarine was being built in the area north of San Lorenzo, Ecuador, along the Ecuador-Colombia border.

The DTO was not discouraged by the seizure and immediately began planning the construction of a replacement submarine in Colombia. With the members of the organization identified and their meeting locations under surveillance around the clock, DEA's Colombian counterparts determined the new location of the second submarine's construction site. After completing the vessel, a specialized tactical unit of the Colombian Navy executed an operation that led to its seizure as well as 3,000 kilograms of cocaine, 2 cocaine laboratories belonging to the DTO, and several firearms.



Operation Tormenta del Manglar.

With the seizure of the second submarine, the Cartagena Resident Office and the Miami Field Division began indicting 22 members of the DTO. Colombian law enforcement arrested 21 of the DTO members with the intention of extraditing them to the United States. During this time frame, the Cartagena Resident Office learned the DTO was building a third submarine. The Bogotá Country Office received separate information from a source regarding the location of the third submarine under construction. It was discovered and destroyed by the CNP Jungla Unit and agents from the Bogotá Country Office.

### DEA Oakland's Operation Burnout (2010)

Since the 1980s, the Burn Out Family Mafia gang had distributed at least two kilograms of heroin and two kilograms of cocaine per month in East Oakland, California, and were also involved in assault, murder, and illegal credit card activity. DEA's Oakland Resident Office and the Oakland Police Department began this investigation in 2010. The gang proved to be a violent organization, terrorizing citizens through fear and intimidation, and the unfolding case included high-speed car chases, shootouts with police and rival gang members, fraud, and drug trafficking.

On June 28, 2010, agents from DEA's Oakland Resident Office, along with numerous federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies arrested 20 individuals, resulting in the dismantlement of the Burn Out Family Mafia gang.

DEA conducted judicially authorized intercepts which led to the identification of the primary gang leaders and their participation in drug activity, violence, and illegal credit card activities. Additionally, agents gathered information regarding four cold-case shootings and cold-case homicides that were provided to the Oakland Police Department for further investigation. Agents intercepted calls that linked defendants to shootings targeting rival gang members.

This 24-month SOD-supported PTO investigation resulted in the arrest of 94 individuals on various state and federal charges and the seizure of 23 guns, \$10,000 in U.S. currency, and four fraudulent credit card manufacturing systems linked to Ukraine and Russia, with thousands of U.S. victims. Undercover and informant-based drug buys conducted during the course of the investigation also contributed to the federal drug indictments.

### DEA New Orleans Targets Ideal Pharmacy (2010)

Members of the New Orleans Tactical Diversion Squad Group 14, along with counterparts from DEA's Atlanta, Caribbean, San Diego, and Seattle Field Divisions, as well as state and local counterparts, assisted in the execution of five state arrest warrants and nine state search warrants for members of a DTO headed by Carlton Charles in May 2010. The DTO bought and sold large quantities of drugs and distributed them without valid prescriptions in New Orleans and across the United States through multiple rogue internet pharmacy fronts.

TDS Group 14 targeted the illegal drug distribution operations of the Ideal Pharmacy Care, Inc., Esplanade Pharmacy, a brick and mortar location in New Orleans, and Web Marketing Services, also of New Orleans. Charles, whose pharmacy license was revoked by the State of Louisiana, headed the DTO. DEA's audits of Ideal Pharmacy between 2006 and 2010 found significant unaccounted shortages of the drugs hydrocodone, alprazolam (Xanax), and promethazine with codeine. The street value of the thousands of missing dosage units from the audits totaled approximately \$4.4 to \$5.9 million.



This casket was found at a location used by the DTO to package drugs to ship across the country; the TDS group could not determine why the casket was there.



During the execution of a search warrant, agents discovered a closet. Inside were several boxes of drugs. After removing the drugs, agents discovered a trap door in the floor covering a storage space containing boxes of pint-size bottles of promethazine with codeine.

During the round-up, agents seized two firearms, approximately \$60,000 in U.S. currency and financial instruments, 12 computers, a money counter, numerous smartphones and thumb drives, 3 vehicles, 30 residential properties, approximately 90,000 non-controlled tablets, approximately 5,000 controlled substance tablets, 22 pints of promethazine with codeine (found in a floor trap), and approximately 17 bank accounts valued at approximately \$3 million. The subjects arrested were charged with criminal offenses including money laundering, racketeering conspiracy, and multiple crimes involving controlled substances, such as drug distribution near a school.

## Indictment of the “American Drug Lord”

In August 2010, DEA’s Atlanta Field Division culminated a multiagency OCDETF, RPOT, and CPOT investigation code named Operation Multiplicity with the arrest of American citizen turned violent Mexican drug lord Edgar Valdez-Villarreal in Mexico. Valdez-Villarreal was known as La Barbie for his good looks. Until his capture, La Barbie was one of the most ruthless drug traffickers in Mexico, working for the Arturo Beltrán-Leyva DTO as a top enforcer. His rise and fall as a drug lord was documented in the September 2011 issue of Rolling Stone magazine. In addition to La Barbie’s arrest, this investigation resulted in the indictment of 21 additional co-conspirators, several of whom were sentenced to over 30 years in prison, as well as the seizure of over \$7,000,000 in U.S. currency and 187 kilograms of cocaine.

## Fighting Pill Mills in Georgia

DEA’s Atlanta Field Division saw the writing on the wall when Florida became the nation’s hot spot for the illegal distribution of prescription pills. Anticipating the passage of stricter Florida legislation targeting the indiscriminate distribution of highly addictive narcotics, the Atlanta Field Division recognized the four-state region, and specifically Georgia, would be the next battleground.

DEA Atlanta took a multidisciplinary approach coordinating Diversion, Intelligence, and Enforcement to prepare for an influx of pill mills. The division stood up a Tactical Diversion Squad, proactively coordinating with state and local agencies and licensure boards to develop an attack plan. Consistent with cooperation at the state and local levels, the Atlanta Field Division led a three-pronged approach of education, legislation, and enforcement to tackle the increase in pill mills. Intelligence analysts collected and implemented shared databases to identify the brokers behind the clinics. Presentations to law enforcement, legislators, healthcare professionals, and local citizens resulted in greater awareness and response.

Some local counties and their citizens responded with moratoriums against pain clinics in their neighborhoods.



Money, totaling \$8.9 million, seized in December 2008 during Operation Four Horsemen. Pictured from left to right, front row: IA Pierre Mangones, TFO Mike Johnson, SA Denise Garcia, TFO Mike Blevins, SA Mark Hadaway, SA Tom Jackson, GS David Stephens. Back row: SA Brian Shields, TFO Alex Scott, SA Darren Krawczyk, SA Ralph Lorio, and SA Shacy Frye.

Legislation was passed in Georgia to implement a Prescription Drug Monitoring Program. Additional legislation was passed placing specific requirements on pain clinics and their owners. Laws in Georgia regarding Schedule II prescriptions increased the requirements to prevent forgery and misuse. The TDS quickly targeted the most egregious clinics that opened in the Atlanta area. Many quickly closed their doors and moved away. Some stayed and were eventually served Immediate Orders to Show Cause actions, search warrants, administrative warrants, and some were arrests were made.

### Operation Four Horsemen (2010)

In the first decade of the new millennium, Atlanta became a major command and control location for significant Mexican DTOs. Atlanta's strategic location within the southeastern part of the United States and its role as a commercial and banking center for the south permitted legitimate businesses to thrive.

Due to increased Mexican DTO command and control functions, the Atlanta Division initiated OCDEF Operation Four Horsemen, which identified and targeted

an importation, transportation, and distribution DTO that spanned multiple states and reported to three high-ranking members of the Mexico-based Hector Beltrán-Leyva Cartel, a designated CPOT. The investigation revealed Atlanta, Georgia, was the organization's primary distribution point, with additional connections to McAllen, Texas; San Antonio, Texas; Chicago, Illinois; Greensboro, North Carolina; and Raleigh, North Carolina. The investigation identified two primary cells operating in Atlanta and Laredo, Texas in a similar fashion, receiving multi-kilogram shipments of cocaine via tractor-trailers from Mexico. After the drug traffickers received the deliveries, they shipped millions of dollars in U.S. currency back to Mexico by concealing the money in tractor-trailers and other vehicles.

The investigation, which culminated in August 2010, resulted in the total seizure of 973 kilograms of cocaine, 1,445 kilograms of marijuana, and over \$31 million in drug proceeds. Additionally, 24 individuals in the Northern District of Georgia, as well as 34 persons in the Southern District of Texas, were indicted and arrested. This investigation included over 100 federal court authorized wire intercepts initiated by DEA agents in the Northern District of Georgia.

## Advertising for Traffickers

In 2010, a radio advertisement on a local Wilmington, North Carolina, radio station resulted in the recruitment of a well-placed source into the Enrique Mendoza-Figueroa DTO. The investigation quickly expanded to a priority target and CPOT-linked investigation using federal wire intercepts and extensive confidential source and undercover activity. The focus of DEA's Wilmington Resident Office in 2011, this case represented how a high-level domestic trafficking organization affects multiple DEA divisions. The investigation resulted in the seizure of \$9,744,997, 134 kilograms of cocaine, 5,883 pounds of marijuana, 13 pounds of methamphetamine, 14 firearms, and 31 arrests, including the July 2012 arrest of DTO leader Mendoza-Figueroa.

## Art Imitates Life in Baltimore

Ask most Baltimore-based DEA agents what it's like to work in Baltimore, and the answer is usually, "Watch *The Wire*." The police work, the dope dealers, and the politics are as close to real-life Baltimore as you can get.

In August 2010, DEA Baltimore's Group 52 (Heroin Task Force) was approached by the Baltimore Police Department along with the State and U.S. Attorney's Offices with a request to join forces against drug traffickers Dana Bowman, Donald "AZ" Wright, and Shawn Johnson. These three were initially identified as partners in a polydrug organization supplying heroin, cocaine, crack, and marijuana throughout the city's Eastern District.

Group 52 agents began intercepting the first of what would be 16 cellular lines belonging to members of the DTOs in October 2010. As expected, dozens of buyers, sellers, and suppliers were identified from the inner city of Baltimore to New York, where the DTO's heroin and cocaine sources were, to San Diego, where the high-grade marijuana originated. The group included Dominican suppliers, Mexican traffickers, local targets of the U.S. Attorney's Violent Repeat Offender program, thugs, hookers, and people from all walks of life. However, no one attracted as much attention as one caller, known on the phone as "Doggie," who was eventually identified as Felicia "Snoop" Pearson.



Baltimore District Office's Special Agent Edward Marcinko (left) and Hagerstown Resident Office Task Force Officer Guy McCartney (right) lead Felicia "Snoop" Pearson from her residence following her 2011 arrest on drug conspiracy charges. Pearson was already famous for her role as an enforcer in the television series, *The Wire*.

Of particular note to the investigators were Pearson's discussions about warehousing drugs for the DTO. In another turn, when a DTO member was kidnapped and held for ransom, the kidnappers were directed to Pearson's home to get the payment. Pearson had been involved in violent drug-related conduct in the past and was previously sentenced to state prison for murder. After her release, she starred in *The Wire*, where she played someone involved in drug dealing as "an enforcer." The show's producers obtained the services of Baltimore-area drug dealers as actors and technical advisers.

In March 2011, the wiretaps ended with the execution of 49 search warrants. More than 500 law enforcement officers participated in the warrant executions and the arrests of more than 70 people indicted on federal and state charges. Guns, heroin, marijuana, and crack were seized. Assets totaling more than \$200,000 were forfeited. The media showed up at only one location for the arrest of one person—Felicia Pearson. According to the reports, she was the most important member of the DTO. In fact, while every federal and state defendant pled guilty or was found

guilty in trial, the only person's plea and sentencing that was covered live by any news source was Pearson's.

## Targeting a Mexican DTO in South Carolina

In August 2010, DEA's Columbia District Office commenced an investigation focused on a multi-ton marijuana importation organization based in Columbia, South Carolina. The group, directly linked to the La Familia cartel, maintained tight contact with Mexican organizers. Over 8,000 pounds of marijuana were tied to this organization. The Columbia District Office monitored two warehouses via court authorized audio and video surveillance orders and numerous pen registers. This marked the first time the office had used closed circuit cameras as part of a Title III investigation in the United States District Court of South Carolina. The investigation completely dismantled the organization, culminating in the arrests of 15 individuals, the seizure of \$1.2 million in bulk currency, and the seizure of 5,500 pounds of marijuana and 3,922 ecstasy tablets.

## DEA Investigation of CVS Results in \$75 Million Civil Penalty

After Mexico banned the sale of pseudoephedrine in mid-2007, Los Angeles and Las Vegas experienced an epidemic of "smurfing," a practice where individuals make multiple purchases of pseudoephedrine in small amounts with the intent to aggregate the purchases for use in illegal methamphetamine production. Smurfers discovered that CVS, unlike other large chain retail pharmacies, allowed customers to make repeated purchases of pseudoephedrine that exceeded federal daily and monthly sales limits. For more than a year, CVS failed to change its sales practices to prevent criminals from purchasing excessive amounts of pseudoephedrine at its stores.

CVS Pharmacy, a subsidiary of CVS Caremark Corporation, failed to ensure compliance with laws limiting sales of pseudoephedrine, which allowed criminals to obtain a key ingredient used in the manufacture of methamphetamine from CVS stores located primarily in Los Angeles County; Orange County, California; and Clark



In the late 2000s, pseudoephedrine smurfing resulted in the largest fine in CSA history at that time.

County, Nevada. Between September 2007 and November 2008, CVS supplied large amounts of pseudoephedrine to methamphetamine traffickers in Southern California, and the company's illegal sales led directly to an increase in methamphetamine production in the state.

The investigation into CVS uncovered thousands of violations of the Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act of 2005, which limits the amount of pseudoephedrine that a customer can purchase in one day. In 2007, CVS implemented an automated electronic logbook system to record individual pseudoephedrine sales, but the system did not prevent multiple purchases by an individual customer on the same day. CVS eventually changed its sales practices to prevent these illegal transactions, but only after it became aware of the government's investigation.

CVS agreed to pay a \$75 million civil penalty, and agreed to forfeit \$2.6 million in profit. At the time, the \$75 million settlement represented the largest civil penalty paid under the CSA. In addition, CVS entered into a separate five-year compliance agreement with DEA.

## Aaron Jenkins Drug Trafficking Organization

In December 2010, DEA's Laredo District Office Group D-73 initiated a case against the Aaron Jenkins DTO, which consisted of previously convicted felons distributing marijuana and cocaine and returning drug proceeds back to Mexican drug cartels.



Aaron Jenkins drug trafficking organization.



The success of this investigation is illustrated by the historical linkage to dozens of narcotic and money seizures and the conviction of all cell leaders/organizers. Group D-73 developed this investigation from a chance encounter that an opportunist undercover agent had with Jenkins in Austin, Texas, in January 2010. Jenkins was on supervised release for the distribution of 20 pounds of cocaine.

The undercover agent advised Jenkins that he was from Laredo, Texas, and owned a fictitious trucking company. Over the course of the investigation, nine separate undercover agents, two pen registers, a four-kilogram cocaine flash, seven separate undercover meetings, surveillances, toll analysis, financial investigations, search warrants, consent searches, arrest warrants, ping orders, mobile tracking devices, 122 recorded consensual conversations, SMS messages, undercover email accounts, undercover bank accounts, and Title III intercepts were all used.

DEA Laredo identified and prosecuted all cell leaders, including Jenkins. His DTO's members were linked to multiple weapons, \$2,155,000 in drug proceeds, 30.8 pounds of cocaine, and 4,250 pounds of marijuana seized throughout the United States.

### **Project Deliverance (2010)**

In June 2010, DEA announced the culmination of Project Deliverance, a 22-month investigation targeting the transportation infrastructure of Mexican DTOs in the United States, especially along the Southwest border. The day before the announcement, 429 of the 2,266 total arrests took place across 16 states through coordination between federal, state, and local law enforcement.

During the enforcement action, \$5.8 million, 17 pounds of methamphetamine, 112 kilograms of cocaine, 2,951 pounds of marijuana, 141 weapons, and 85 vehicles were seized. In addition to 2,266 total arrests, Project Deliverance led to the seizure of \$154 million, 1,262 pounds of methamphetamine, 2.5 tons of cocaine, 1,410 pounds of heroin, 69 tons of marijuana, 501 weapons, and 527 vehicles over the course of the operation. Acting Administrator Leonhart stated, "Project Deliverance inflicted a debilitating blow to the network of shadow facilitators and transportation cells

controlled by the major Mexican drug cartels. The stakes are extraordinarily high, and this massive operation is a milestone in our tireless assault on these violent drug cartels."

### **Controlling Synthetic Cannabinoids**

Beginning in 2009, DEA received an increasing number of reports from poison centers, hospitals, and law enforcement on products marketed as "legal" smokable herbal blends providing a marijuana-like high. The products consisted of plant material coated with research chemicals that mimicked THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, and were sold at various retail outlets, in head shops, and online. These chemicals, however, were not approved by FDA for human consumption, and there was no oversight of their manufacturing. Brands such as "Spice," "K2," "Blaze," and "Red X Dawn" had been labeled as incense to mask their intended purpose.

On July 9, 2012, President Barack Obama signed the FDA Safety and Innovation Act, which added cannabimimetic agents, including 15 specific cannabimimetic agents by name, to CSA's Schedule I. Five synthetic cannabinoids had previously been controlled by DEA under a temporary emergency scheduling order since March 2011.

### **Multinational Operation Nets \$55.9 Million Heroin Seizure in Afghanistan**

On October 29, 2010, a multinational DEA operation led to the seizure of \$55.9 million in heroin at four clandestine laboratories located in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. The nearly one metric ton of narcotics was seized as a result of a large-scale joint narcotics enforcement operation by DEA, Afghan, and Russian antidrug agents in Afghanistan. In addition to seizing 932 kilograms of heroin and 156 kilograms of opium, a large quantity of precursor chemicals and materials were also confiscated.

### **No Quarter Given by Raleigh DO**

In 2011 and 2012, DEA's Raleigh Resident Office targeted the Jorge Acosta-Muro DTO in an investigation dubbed Operation No Quarter. Indeed, no quarter was given by the Raleigh Resident Office, and the investigation resulted in

over 60 arrests and the seizure of 127 kilograms of cocaine, 31 pounds of crystal methamphetamine, 200 pounds of marijuana, 32 grams of heroin, over \$1.5 million in U.S. currency, 25 firearms, and personal and real property valued at more than \$2 million. Operation No Quarter led to the indictment of “El Comandante 4,” a Gulf Cartel leader and a chief lieutenant for CPOT Jorge Eduardo Costilla-Sánchez, AKA El Coss.

### Shutting Down a Pill Pipeline

In April 2011, DEA’s Bridgeport Resident Office Southwestern Connecticut HIDTA Task Force and the Stamford Police Narcotics and Organized Crime Unit initiated an investigation of a multistate oxycodone DTO. Based on information from an informant, Michael McGilvary of Florida was identified as the main source of oxycodone supply to several Connecticut distributors. McGilvary was transporting thousands of oxycodone pills from South Florida to cities throughout Connecticut during 2010 and 2011. The oxycodone was transported to the northeast via commercial airline. Bribes were paid to multiple TSA employees within the Westchester County, New York, airport and the West Palm Beach, Florida, airport.

Payments were made directly to the TSA employees to circumvent security measures and facilitate the illegal transportation of oxycodone and currency. Bribery payments were also made to a Westchester County, New York, police officer for assisting the DTO in bypassing airport security. In addition, a Florida Highway Patrol officer participated in protecting members of this DTO. The investigation concluded with the arrest of 20 individuals, including numerous public officials. Over 10,000 oxycodone pills and assets totaling \$221,000 were seized.

### Targeting Heroin in St. Louis

In July 2011, the DEA St. Louis MET collaborated with 12 St. Louis-area police departments to develop and execute a comprehensive enforcement strategy designed to target their regional heroin trade.

Between July and September 2011, DEA special agents, along with those local departments, attacked all levels of

the heroin trade, culminating in the execution of 10 search warrants, the seizure of significant quantities of heroin and cocaine, and 75 arrests.

### St. Louis Case Results in the Arrest of La Familia Cell Head

In June 2011, St. Louis Division Group 31 arrested 29 members of an international cocaine trafficking group directly connected to the Mexico-based La Familia organization. Ten of those arrested were from St. Louis and the remaining were located in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Texas. Intelligence developed during this case led to telecommunication intercepts in three DEA field divisions. During the course of the investigation, agents seized more than 50 kilograms of cocaine, 13 pounds of heroin, 530 pounds of marijuana, and nearly \$2 million.

### Operation Bad Attitude (2011)

In April 2011, DEA Seattle Field Division’s HIDTA Integrated Task Force Group dismantled the Jacob Stuart international marijuana and cocaine trafficking organization, dubbed Operation Bad Altitude. The DTO was responsible for the monthly distribution of approximately 1,000 to 2,000 pounds of high-grade Canadian and domestic indoor grown marijuana and 100 to 200 kilograms of cocaine throughout the United States and Canada. Semi-trucks with hidden compartments were used to smuggle the marijuana from Canada. It was then unloaded and sorted in a warehouse in Kent, Washington, and distributed across the country to California, Illinois, Missouri, Georgia, and New Jersey.

Michael Murphy served as a chief pilot for the DTO, flying marijuana and cash across the country and hiring other pilots to fly the drugs. The DTO used a six different private airline pilots and four airplanes to transport their illicit drugs and drug proceeds. Proceeds from the marijuana distribution were used to purchase cocaine from Southern California. The cocaine was then transported to British Columbia for distribution. The smuggling organization had ties to the Hells Angels outlaw motorcycle gang in British Columbia, Canada.

The investigation led to the arrest of 25 individuals on federal drug charges and the seizure of over 2,300 pounds of marijuana, 136 kilograms of cocaine, and \$3,625,459, to include 3 private aircraft used by the DTO.

### Attacking Valencia Rodriguez Organization in Tucson

In 2008, Jesus Valencia Rodriguez was identified as the Mexico-based gatekeeper working for the Caborca-based Paez-Soto cell of the Sinaloa Cartel. Valencia-Rodriguez coordinated the importation of multi-ton quantities of marijuana and undocumented noncitizens from Mexico into the United States through the San Miguel Gate area and the smuggling of bulk drug proceeds and assault weapons back into Mexico. The San Miguel Gate area is a remote U.S./Mexico border location on the Tohono O’Odham Indian Reservation in Arizona. The reservation allows tribal members to pass freely between the United States and Mexico.

Beginning in May 2008, law enforcement intelligence linked over 150 drug seizures totaling approximately 28,000 pounds of marijuana to the Valencia-Rodriguez DTO. In February 2010, law enforcement officials also seized 41 assault weapons in the San Miguel vicinity that were en route from Phoenix, Arizona, to Valencia-Rodriguez in Mexico. The organization used compartments in vehicles, ramped vehicle loads, concealed tire loads, and backpackers to facilitate drug transportation operations in the remote desert area.

In May 2011, DEA’s Tucson District Office OCDEF Strike Force, along with the Arizona Attorney General’s Office and the Tohono O’Odham Nation Police Department, announced the arrests of 27 of 46 suspected members of the Jesus Valencia Rodriguez DTO, working on behalf of the Mexican Sinaloa Cartel, on charges of conducting an illegal enterprise, conspiracy, transportation of marijuana for sale; money laundering; participating in a criminal syndicate; smuggling human beings; and use of a wire communication or electronic communication in a drug-related transaction.



San Miguel Gate on the Tohono O’Odham Indian Reservation.

### DEA Tijuana Helps Dismantle Arellano-Félix Organization

The Arellano-Félix organization (AFO) was one of Mexico’s most powerful and violent criminal enterprises over two decades. AFO is allegedly responsible for several hundred murders, including the assassination of Catholic Cardinal Juan Posadas-Ocampo in 1993. The organization was named for the brothers in charge: Benjamín, Ramón, Eduardo, Javier, and Rafael. Based in Tijuana, AFO had tentacles throughout Mexico, Colombia, and the United States. The organization emerged in the late 1980s and dominated cocaine and methamphetamine smuggling into the United States for over two decades. AFO also engaged in kidnapping for ransom, extortion, and money laundering. Over the course of more than 10 years, DEA Tijuana agents dismantled AFO by arresting its top lieutenants and systematically debilitating its infrastructure.

In February 2002, Ramón Arellano-Félix, AFO’s brutal and notorious enforcer, was assassinated by rival cartel members in Mazatlán, Sinaloa.

In March 2002, DEA Tijuana shared information with Mexico that led to the introduction of an undercover Mexican military officer into the organization, leading the Mexican military to a location in Puebla where Benjamín Arellano-Félix was arrested.

In April 2004, DEA Tijuana executed Operation Crossfire, resulting in the arrests of 43 high-ranking Mexican law enforcement officials in a single sweep. Every officer arrested had been meticulously recruited by AFO to perform specific functions for the organization, to include murder, kidnapping, protection, and drug distribution. The 43 arrested in Operation Crossfire included the Tijuana Police Chief, the State Deputy Attorney General, and the Commander for State Judicial Police.


In June 2004, DEA Tijuana launched Operation United Eagles and arrested three of the highest-ranking AFO lieutenants along with their protection details and money launderers. The most noteworthy arrestees were plaza bosses Alberto “Cris” Simental-García, Efraín “El Efra” Pérez-Pazuengo, and Jorge “Macumba” Aureliano-Félix.

In August 2006, as a continuation of Operation United Eagles, AFO chief Javier Arellano-Félix and several of his top lieutenants were arrested aboard a luxury fishing boat named “Doc Holiday” off the coast of La Paz, Baja California Sur, by the U.S. Coast Guard. In October 2008, Eduardo Arellano-Félix, the last remaining Arellano-Félix brother, was arrested in Tijuana. He was extradited to the United States in September 2012. Afterwards, AFO leadership fell to Fernando “El Inge” Sánchez-Arellano, a nephew of the Arellano-Félix brothers, and his operations lieutenant, Armando “Gordo” Villareal-Heredia.

On July 9, 2011, DEA Tijuana agents, in conjunction with DEA Hermosillo agents and the Mexican federal police SIU, located and arrested DEA fugitive Armando Villareal-Heredia in Hermosillo, Sonora. DEA Tijuana


**DEA/TIJUANA**  
**THE END OF AN ERA: DISMANTLING THE**  
**ARELLANO-FELIX DTO**

**REWARD**  
of up to **\$5,000,000.00 USD**  
*(per brother)*


  
Eduardo Arellano-Félix


**ARELLANO-FÉLIX**  
**HOTLINE**  
Toll-Free from USA  
**1-800-720-7775**

Collect/Direct from Mexico  
**001-858-277-4215**  
All calls answered by U.S. Agents  
All calls confidential  
Email: [afotips@usdoj.gov](mailto:afotips@usdoj.gov)


  
Javier Arellano-Félix


**REWARD**  
of up to **\$2,000,000.00 USD**  
*(for each)*  
For information leading to the arrest or conviction of AFO Fugitives


  
Ismael Higuera-Guerrero


  
Gilberto Higuera-Guerrero

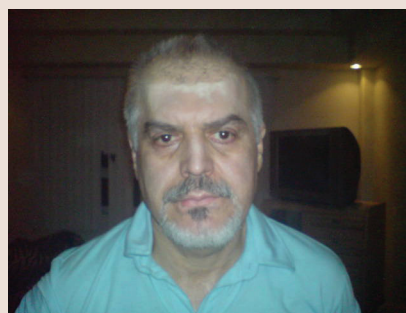
  
Efraín Pérez

  
Gustavo Rivera-Martínez

  
Manuel Aguirre-Galindo

  
Edgardo Leyva-Escandon

  
Jorge Aureliano-Félix



The Arellano-Félix Brothers (from left to right): Ramón, Benjamín, Rafael, Javier, and Eduardo.

has assisted host nation counterparts and DEA's San Diego Field Division in conducting hundreds of other AFO arrests, seizing multi-ton quantities of drugs and millions of dollars, and destroying numerous clandestine tunnels to further dismantle AFO.

### Operation Evolution (2011)

St. Louis Field Division Group 37 began an investigation targeting the heroin, cocaine, and marijuana trafficking activities of the Viconto Johnson and Quentin Thompson DTO. Thompson had been an associate of the Black Mafia Family during its heyday but was incarcerated when Group 37 opened its case. Imprisonment did not stop Thompson from conducting his drug trafficking venture with Johnson and others in St. Louis. While at a halfway house, Thompson began making plans to ship large quantities of drugs from the western United States to the Midwest.

In July 2010, investigators learned that Johnson sought to equip a vehicle with a concealed compartment to ship cocaine from Arizona to Missouri. Agents received authorization to intercept Johnson's telephone and learned that in November 2010, he planned to send this vehicle to Arizona to obtain the cocaine. The wiretap indicated that the car would be driving back on Christmas Eve 2010. Investigators obtained a seizure warrant for the trap car and drove out to Colorado to intercept it. On a cold and snowy Christmas Eve, agents seized the vehicle while the driver was occupied

in rural Colorado. When the vehicle was searched pursuant to a warrant, investigators seized eight kilograms of cocaine secreted inside a sophisticated hydraulic concealed compartment.

In the summer of 2011, the case culminated in search warrants of various properties associated with the group. The searches yielded approximately 3 kilograms of heroin and about \$600,000 in assets, about \$200,000 of which was expensive jewelry. Later that summer, St. Louis Field Division Group 32 arrested 37 people, all of the case's principal players.

### Juárez Cartel's Chief Enforcer Captured

Since 2010, DEA Ciudad Juárez agents, in conjunction with an SIU of the Mexican federal police, had been investigating José Antonio "Diego" Acosta-Hernández as the leader of La Línea, an enforcement arm of the Juárez Cartel. A former police officer, Acosta-Hernández was arrested on July 29, 2011. He had been working directly for "El Pariente," a high-ranking member of the Juárez Cartel and close associate of cartel leader Vicente Carrillo-Fuentes.

As "chief enforcer" for the cartel, Acosta-Hernández was instrumental in instigating the bloodshed that engulfed Ciudad Juárez in a turf war between the Juárez and Sinaloa cartels. Furthermore, he ordered daily assassinations, kidnappings, extortions, and attacks against



Assets seized in Operation Evolution.





José Antonio Acosta-Hernández.

Sinaloa Cartel members, civilians, and law enforcement personnel. Acosta-Hernández also threatened DEA agents for assisting Mexican law enforcement agencies in their investigation of the Juárez Cartel.

### Operation OG Style (2009)

In August 2009, officers from the Phoenix Police Department's South Mountain Precinct noticed an increase in neighborhood narcotics complaints and the violent crime often associated with that type of activity. As their investigation moved forward, several criminal street gangs were identified and appeared to be working together to further their lucrative illegal drug operation. Due to the investigation's complexity, a partnership was formed with DEA and the Arizona Attorney General's Office. Investigators monitored these suspects, ultimately identifying gang leaders and the primary subjects who were purchasing, manufacturing, and distributing crack cocaine throughout the South Mountain area. Twenty simultaneous search warrants were served across the valley as part of this undercover operation coined Operation OG Style. Dozens of arrests occurred and large property seizures took place.

### Operation Crank Call (2011)

On December 20, 2011, DEA's Phoenix Field Division along with the Tempe Police Department, the Arizona Attorney General's Office, and the Maricopa County Attorney's Office announced the culmination of a 15-month long investigation regarding an extensive trafficking cell associated with the Sinaloa Cartel headed by Joaquín Chapo Guzmán and Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada-García. Tempe Police Detectives initiated the investigation after a patrol officer proactively contacted a subject upon observing an illegal drug transaction taking place in his patrol area. Both subjects were arrested; one was later identified as a driver for a DTO that delivered methamphetamine to several customers in Tempe, as well as other customers in Maricopa County.

Based on information from the patrol officer's investigation, detectives from the Tempe Police Special Investigations Bureau, special agents from DEA's Phoenix Field Division Strike Force Group 2, and prosecutors from Maricopa County Attorney's Office and Attorney General's Office initiated a joint undercover investigation into the DTO. Tempe Police Detectives received information that DEA's Phoenix Field Division was investigating common

elements of the DTO, and the joint investigation, dubbed Operation Crank Call, was initiated.

The investigation resulted in 203 arrests, 43 search warrants, 44 firearms, \$7.8 million dollars in cash, 650 pounds of marijuana, 435 pounds of methamphetamine, 123 pounds of cocaine, and 4.5 pounds of heroin.

### 38th Street Gang Round-Up

On February 1, 2011, DEA announced the culmination of the 38th Street Gang round-up. One of the oldest in California, the gang had a devastating impact on South Los Angeles communities. It allegedly engaged in the continuous distribution of methamphetamine, cocaine, and crack cocaine, and participated in numerous violent acts throughout the

area. Nearly 800 law enforcement officers took part in the raid that arrested nearly 60 individuals. During the operation, law enforcement seized approximately 7 kilograms of cocaine, a pound of methamphetamine, 23 firearms, and approximately \$250,000 in cash.

Fifty of the defendants were charged with violating the RICO Act by acting on behalf of the gang and participating in murders, murder plots, attempted murders, narcotics trafficking, robberies, extortion, and witness intimidation. The racketeering count alleges 250 overt acts, many of them violent crimes, including assaults on rival gang members and law enforcement officers. Most of the defendants in the racketeering case faced sentencing to life in federal prison.



Weapons and money seized during Operation OG Style.



Saucepan containing residue of crack cocaine uncovered during Operation OG Style.



Cash seized in Operation Crank Call.

## Operation Pill Nation (2011)

DEA's Operation Pill Nation targeted clinics that operated as pill mills, offering patients prescriptions for oxycodone and other controlled substances where there was no legitimate medical purpose and not within the usual course of professional medical practice.

Those involved were planning to distribute and dispense more than 660,000 units of the Schedule II narcotic oxycodone. To distribute the drugs, the doctors marketed the clinics through more than 1,600 websites and required immediate cash payments from patients for a clinic "visit fee." They then directed the patients to obtain MRIs that they knew to be inferior. The defendants then over aggressively interpreted the MRIs to justify prescriptions. They also falsified patients' urine tests for a fee to justify the highly addictive pain medications. Money laundering also occurred among those involved.

Operation Pill Nation consisted of over 340 undercover buys of prescription drugs from over 60 doctors in more than 40 pill mills. It concluded in February 2011 and netted 22 arrests and seized over \$2.2 million in cash and 70 vehicles, including numerous exotic cars.

## Project Delirium (2011)

Project Delirium was a 20-month series of nationwide investigations that targeted the La Familia Michoacana cartel. La Familia, a violent Mexican cartel, is known for trafficking methamphetamine into the United States and unspeakable violence on both sides of the border. Information sharing between DEA and Mexican police yielded significant arrests and seizures of drugs and money in Mexico. Project Delirium culminated in July 2011 and resulted in 1,985 arrests, the seizure of \$62 million in currency, the seizure of approximately 2,773 pounds of methamphetamine, 2,722 kilograms of cocaine, 1,005 pounds of heroin, 14,818 pounds of marijuana, and \$3.8 million in other assets.

## NTCC Visit to the El Paso Intelligence Center

On June 16, 2011, over eighty members of the North Texas Crime Commission visited EPIC. The group, led by DEA's

Dallas Field Division's SAC James Capra and EPIC Director Arthur Doty, toured the facility and received an overview of EPIC's mission and vision, as well as details on several intelligence programs that support law enforcement agencies worldwide.

## Operation Fire and Ice (2011)

With the June 2, 2011, culmination of Operation Fire and Ice, DEA announced that from an international money laundering and drug conspiracy investigation that originated in East Boston, Massachusetts nearly five years prior, federal law enforcement authorities were charging 20 individuals and seizing 48 bank accounts across the United States. This was a multinational operation that for over four years involved DEA's New England Field Division, along with the agency's Bogotá, Guatemala, Mexico, Curaçao, and Rome, Italy, foreign offices. These offices were investigating the narcotics and money laundering trafficking conglomerate identified as La Oficina de Envigado.

Beginning in 2008, DEA conducted undercover money pick-ups in Rome and elsewhere, resulting in the seizure of approximately 225 kilograms of cocaine in Rome and the arrest of 25 individuals in Italy on drug trafficking and money laundering offenses. DEA Boston and Curaçao also investigated the conglomerate's money laundering activities in Aruba. On April 14, 2010, a federal grand jury in Boston returned an indictment charging two residents of Aruba. On May 19, 2011, a federal grand jury in Boston returned an indictment charging 20 individuals from Colombia, Venezuela, and Massachusetts with drug trafficking and money laundering offenses.

## DEA Helps Foil Iranian Terror Plot

An elaborate scheme to murder the Saudi Ambassador to the United States with explosives was foiled in October 2011, thanks to the work of a DEA-led investigation. Two individuals were charged with conspiracy to murder a foreign official, conspiracy to engage in foreign travel and use of interstate and foreign commerce facilities in the commission of murder-for-hire, conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction (explosives), and conspiracy

to commit an act of international terrorism transcending national boundaries.

The criminal complaint alleged that from the spring of 2011 to October 2011, Manssor Arbabsiar, a 56-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen holding both Iranian and U.S. passports, and Gholam Shakuri, an Iran-based member of Iran's Qods Force, a special operations unit of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that is said to sponsor and promote terrorist activities abroad, worked together on the plot. Arbabsiar allegedly met on several occasions in Mexico with a DEA confidential source who had posed as an associate of a violent international drug trafficking cartel. According to the complaint, Arbabsiar arranged to hire DEA's confidential source and his accomplices to murder the Ambassador, and Shakuri and other Iran-based co-conspirators were aware of and approved the plan with \$100,000 wired to a U.S. bank account as a down payment for the killing.

### First Intelligence Division Awards Ceremony

On December 14, 2011, the first DEA Intelligence Division Awards Ceremony was held at DEA Headquarters to

recognize Intelligence personnel for outstanding achievements, exceptional performance, and years of government service. Intelligence Analyst Stephanie Murphy received special recognition for 45 years of federal service, including 36 years with DEA. During her opening remarks, Administrator Leonhart acknowledged the Intelligence Division's unfaltering efforts on behalf of the agency and its remarkable contributions to DEA's mission. James R. Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, served as the event's keynote speaker. It was Director Clapper's first visit to DEA, during which he told the audience, "DEA punches way above its weight and the more you do, the more I admire the agency."

### New Domestic Strategic Intelligence Unit and Document/Media Exploitation Section

The Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2012, signed into law by the President on November 18, 2011, provided funding to DOJ for the closure of the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) located in Johnstown, Pennsylvania and the reassignment of NDIC



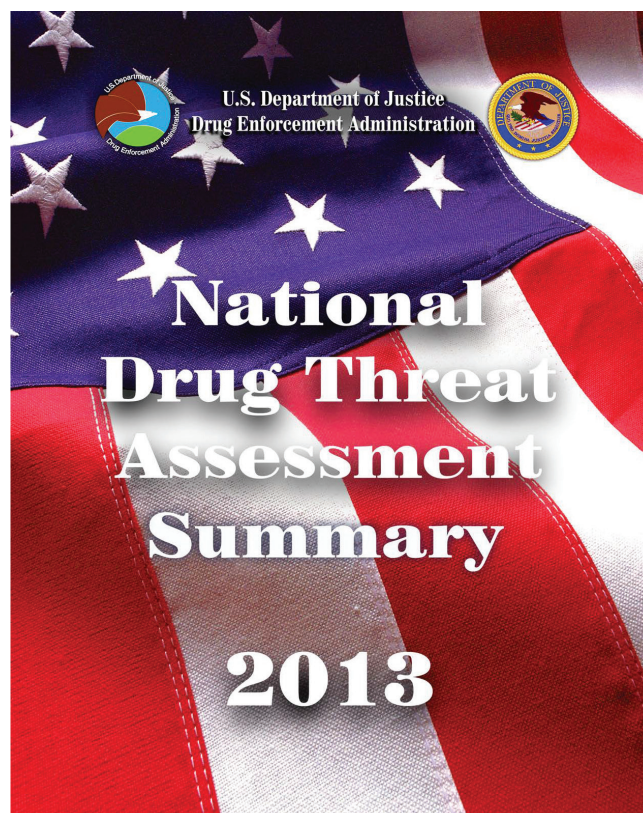
First DEA Intelligence Division Awards Ceremony, 2011. From left, Chief of Intelligence Rodney Benson; Director of National Intelligence James Clapper; Intelligence Analyst Stephanie Murphy; Administrator Michele Leonhart.

functions to other DOJ entities. As a result, the Attorney General directed DEA to assume NDIC's high priority strategic intelligence reporting function and the document and media exploitation (DOMEX) function. Upon transitioning both to DEA in June 2012, the newly created Domestic Strategic Intelligence Unit (NWWD) and Document/Media Exploitation Section (NSE) were staffed with former NDIC intelligence analysts and technical personnel, along with current DEA intelligence analysts.

The establishment of NWWD allows DEA to enhance its production of national-level strategic drug intelligence to provide policymakers with the most current information on availability, demand, production, cultivation, transportation, and distribution, as well as the effects of drugs on people and society. DEA produces the National Drug Threat Assessment on an annual basis for policymakers, law enforcement personnel, and prevention and treatment providers at the federal, state, local, and tribal levels. This assessment draws upon a broad range of information sources to describe and analyze the drug threat to the nation. Additionally, DEA produces national level topical assessments, on an as-needed basis, regarding specific drug threats. These recurring strategic products draw upon DEA information and reporting from law enforcement, intelligence, and public health sources, along with open source information.

DOMEX is a unique program that allows intelligence analysts to quickly process vital information obtained from investigative files, as well as documents and electronic media seized during the execution of search warrants and subpoenas. This evidence is then organized and analyzed to reveal associations, assets, and methods of drug traffickers in support of criminal investigations and prosecutions.

Many of the largest investigations supported by the DOMEX program have a digital component, which includes the exploitation of computers, PDAs, BlackBerrys, cell phones, and digital cameras. This electronic media exploitation has proved to be an extremely valuable component of the overall DOMEX effort.



## Sinaloa Cartel Death Squad Leader Sentenced to Life in Prison

On January 6, 2012, Sinaloa Cartel hit-squad leader Rafael Figueroa-Merino, AKA Anibal, was sentenced in El Paso to multiple life terms following his guilty plea to federal charges of engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise. Figueroa, a legal permanent resident of the United States and chief assassin for Sinaloa Cartel lieutenant Jose Antonio Torres-Marrufo, was arrested in El Paso upon entering the United States from Mexico in April 2011.

Once in DEA custody, Figueroa admitted his involvement in numerous acts of violence in furtherance of the Sinaloa Cartel's battle with the Juárez Cartel for control of the lucrative Ciudad Juárez drug trafficking corridor, including the May 2010 kidnapping and murder of three individuals, one a United States citizen, who were attending a wedding at a church in the city. Figueroa also admitted his involvement in a rare case of cross-border violence in which a trafficker was kidnapped from Horizon City, Texas, in September 2009 and taken to



Pictured is a 50-caliber machine gun found in the arsenal in Ciudad Juárez.

Ciudad Juárez, where he was tortured and killed for his role in the transportation of a load of marijuana seized in the United States. In addition, DEA's investigation linked Figueroa to the importation of 1,000 kilograms of cocaine for which he provided security.

Following his arrest, information provided by Figueroa led to the arrest of a co-conspirator in El Paso and a large seizure of weapons and ammunition hidden in a home in Ciudad Juárez.

### Rikin Escajeda Extradited and Convicted (2012)

On March 1, 2012, José Rodolfo Escajeda, AKA Rikin, was sentenced in El Paso to 35 years in prison following his guilty plea to a 2006 indictment charging him with marijuana and cocaine trafficking. José Escajeda and his

brother, Oscar Alonso Escajeda-Candelaria, were leaders of a DTO that controlled drug smuggling from the Valle de Juárez, which is situated east of Ciudad Juárez along the Rio Grande, to the United States.

Escajeda was extradited from Mexico to the United States on December 11, 2010, and later admitted to smuggling over 100,000 kilograms of marijuana into the United States on behalf of the Juárez Cartel from 2003 through 2008. During that time period, Escajeda, who used intimidation to control smuggling routes in the Valle de Juárez, worked with high-level members of the Juárez Cartel to collect taxes on drug loads and bribe Mexican officials. He also personally paid millions of dollars in drug proceeds to Juárez Cartel leaders. In January 2006, employees of Escajeda were involved in a high-profile confrontation with Texas law enforcement authorities at Neely's Crossing on the Rio Grande in Hudspeth County while attempting to smuggle marijuana into the United States using Mexican military-style vehicles. Oscar Alonso Escajeda-Candelaria was extradited from Mexico to the United States in April 2009 and sentenced to more than 27 years in prison in April 2010.

### Kevin Corley Arrested (2012)

Agents from DEA's Laredo, Texas; Colorado Springs, Colorado; Columbia, South Carolina; and Charleston, South Carolina, Offices, along with various federal, state, and local law enforcement officers, arrested Kevin Corley and seven other individuals on March 24, 2012.



A DEA agent and U.S. Marshals escorting Escajeda.



Undercover meet in Laredo on March 24. Left to right: Samuel Walker, Jerome Corley, TFO Joe Benavides, SA John Leonard, Shavar Davis, and Kevin Corley.

Since 2011, Corley had numerous meetings with undercover law enforcement officers posing as members of the Los Zetas drug cartel. Over the next several months, Corley continued to communicate with undercover agents via text messaging, phone calls, and emails regarding the services he could provide them as a result of the training, experience, and access to information and equipment afforded to him as an active duty U.S. Army officer. Corley revealed that weapons could easily be stolen from military posts and thoroughly explained military tactics, telling undercover agents he could train 40 cartel members in two weeks.

During a conversation between Corley and an undercover agent in December 2011, Corley explained that he had one team prepared to help train cartel members and another to conduct “wet work” (murder-for-hire) at the cartel’s direction. Corley told agents he would accept cocaine in lieu of a fee for his service but ultimately agreed to accept \$50,000 and 5 kilograms of cocaine for a full team. Corley also offered to refund the money if the victim survived.



At the same meeting, Corley negotiated to purchase and escort 500 pounds of marijuana.

On January 14, 2012, Corley, Marcus Mickle, Calvin Epps, and Jerome Corley traveled to Laredo, Texas, to escort the 500 pounds of marijuana to South Carolina. The tractor-trailer transporting the shipment was pulled

over and the marijuana was seized during a traffic stop in La Salle County, Texas. In the weeks following this seizure, Corley and his co-conspirators continued to contact undercover agents regarding the seized marijuana load and to discuss the possibility of future transactions with the agents.

On March 5, 2012, Corley delivered two AR-15 assault rifles with scopes, an airsoft assault rifle, five allegedly stolen ballistic vests, and other miscellaneous equipment to an undercover agent in Colorado Springs, Colorado. At the meet Corley and the undercover agent discussed Corley bringing his team to Laredo to conduct the contract killing and retrieve the 20 kilograms of cocaine on March 24, 2012. Corley told the undercover agent he had bought a new Ka-Bar knife to carve a “Z” (for “Zeta”) into the victim’s chest and was planning on buying a hatchet to dismember the body.

On March 24, 2012, Corley and his team traveled to Laredo to meet with undercover agents and perform the contract killing. They were arrested and the operation dismantled Corley’s marijuana and cocaine trafficking organization. Three individuals, including Corley, were arrested in Laredo, two were arrested in Columbia, and three other members were arrested in Charleston.

### **Rowland Heights, California, Doctor Tried for Murder in Three Overdose Deaths**

In 2007, DEA Riverside, California, began an investigation into the prescribing practices of Dr. Lisa Tseng, a Rowland Heights, California, Doctor of Osteopathy. DEA Riverside coordinated this investigation with California’s Medical Board and conducted numerous undercover patient-visit operations targeting Dr. Tseng.

In August 2010, from Schedule III narcotic prescriptions gained as evidence during the undercover patient visits, DEA Riverside along with the Medical Board and the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department executed a federal search warrant on Dr. Tseng’s clinic in Rowland Heights. DEA Riverside also worked with the DEA Office of Chief Counsel and served an Immediate

suspension order upon Dr. Tseng and her DEA Certificate of Registration, thereby stopping her ability to write controlled substance prescriptions.

In March 2012, as a result of the DEA investigation and evidence obtained from the search warrant, Dr. Tseng was arrested and charged by the Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office with second-degree murder in three overdose patient deaths and 20 felony counts of prescribing drugs to patients with no legitimate medical indication.

In June 2012, a preliminary hearing was conducted and a Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge ordered Dr. Tseng to stand trial for the three second-degree murder charges and an additional 20 felony counts. It was the first time the Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office filed murder charges against a doctor because of allegedly reckless prescribing practices. Tseng was convicted and sentenced to 30 years to life in prison in 2016.

### **Juárez Drug Cartel Leader Sentenced to More Than 10 Life Terms**

In April 2012, the Juárez Drug Cartel’s leader in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua, Mexico, pled guilty in El Paso, Texas, and was sentenced to life in prison for his participation in drug trafficking and numerous acts of violence, including the triple homicide of U.S. Consulate employee Lesley Enriquez, her husband El Paso Country Sheriff’s Office Detention Officer Arthur Redelfs, and Jorge Salcido, the husband of another U.S. Consulate employee. José Antonio Acosta-Hernández, 34, had been extradited to the United States from Mexico in March 2012. He pled guilty to four counts of racketeering, narcotics trafficking, money laundering, and murder.

Acosta-Hernández admitted that in approximately 2008 he became the leader of La Línea’s armed enforcement wing and acted as Vicente Carrillo-Fuentes’ plaza boss in Chihuahua and Juárez. Acosta-Hernández admitted that he directed or participated in more than 1,500 murders since 2008. Immediately after the guilty plea hearing, Acosta-Hernández was sentenced to 7 concurrent life terms, 3 additional consecutive life terms, and 20 years in federal prison.



DEA and FBI Agents taking Acosta into custody in the U.S.

## Tracking the Sinaloa Cartel's "El Chapo" Guzmán

Joaquín Archivaldo Guzmán-Loera, variously known as El Chapo, El Señor, The Man, or The Lord, was born on April 4, 1957, in Badiraguato, Sinaloa, Mexico. Known as the Golden Triangle (i.e., Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua), the region is central to Mexico's marijuana and opium poppy cultivation industry. Guzmán-Loera's father had connections in the Sinaloa capital of Culiacán through narco-trafficking "pioneer" Pedro Avilés-Peréz. In the late 1970s, Héctor "El Guero" Luis Palma-Salazar gave Guzmán-Loera his first break and placed him in charge of transporting illegal drugs from the Sierra Madres to the U.S. southwest border. In the early 1980s, Guzmán-Loera was

introduced to Miguel "El Padrino" Ángel Félix-Gallardo who put him in charge of logistics, coordinating airplane flights, boat arrivals, and trucks coming from Colombia into Mexico. After Félix-Gallardo's capture, Guzmán-Loera took control of the Sinaloa Cartel.

On June 9, 1993, Guzmán-Loera was captured in Guatemala and extradited to Mexico on drug trafficking, criminal association, and bribery charges. On November 22, 1995, he was transferred to the Puente Grande maximum security prison. With connections inside the prison, including the facility's director, Guzmán-Loera escaped.

Guzmán-Loera was one of the most wanted criminals in the world. Many in the organized crime world considered him a ghost who became a legend. In the early

2010s, the Sinaloa Cartel, comprised of Guzmán-Loera, Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada-García, and Juan “El Azul” Esparragosa-Moreno, controlled a vast drug distribution empire that spanned six continents. The Sinaloa Cartel is one of the largest suppliers of illegal drugs (cocaine, marijuana, heroin, and methamphetamine) to the United States. Guzmán-Loera had been ranked by Forbes magazine as one of the most powerful people in the world every year from 2009 through 2012. He was also listed by Forbes as the 10th richest man in Mexico in 2011.

Upon his escape, Guzmán-Loera had multiple indictments on drug conspiracy charges in the United States and a \$5 million reward for his capture. DEA’s North & Central Americas Region (NCAR) in cooperation with the government of Mexico launched numerous enforcement operations against him and his associates.

On February 13, 2012, CPOT Jaime Herrera-Herrera and an associate, Felipe Naranjo-Sevilla, were detained in Culiacán by the Policía Federal Preventiva in possession of approximately 202 kilograms of methamphetamine. The Mazatlán office, in conjunction with DEA’s Washington Field Division and the Secretaria de Seguridad Publica SIU, had been targeting the Herrera-Herrera DTO since 2007. Herrera-Herrera led a Sinaloa Cartel-aligned DTO that trafficked thousands of pounds of methamphetamine and hundreds of kilograms of cocaine on a monthly basis from the interior of Mexico through Arizona and California ports of entry to U.S. cities.

In February 2012, NCAR personnel provided actionable intelligence to SSP personnel advising that Guzmán-Loera was in a residence in Cabo San Lucas, Baja California Sur. SSP launched an enforcement operation that resulted in the arrests of his close associates. Consequently, several high-powered assault rifles with grenade launchers, several cellular telephones, ammunition, and personal items that belonged to Guzmán-Loera were seized. DEA Intelligence advised that he was able to evade law enforcement through the help of one of his associates.

On May 24, 2012, NCAR personnel provided actionable intelligence to Secretaria de la Marina (SEMAR, Mexican Navy) personnel advising that Zambada-García



Seized items from the Sinaloa Cartel.

and possibly Guzmán-Loera would be at Rancho Aguaje in Badiraguato, Sinaloa. SEMAR launched an enforcement operation, which resulted in a gun battle between SEMAR and Sinaloa Cartel members. Subsequently, several high-powered assault rifles with grenade launchers, several cellular telephones, ammunition, and personal items that belonged to Zambada-García were seized. DEA Intelligence advised that Zambada-García evaded military personnel through the help of one of his associates and fled to the east into the mountainous region bordering Durango. The hunt continued.

## Prescription Drug Take Back Days and Disposal Programs

DEA and government, community, public health, and law enforcement partners launched a nationwide prescription drug take back initiative that sought to prevent increased pill misuse and theft. Through the initiative, DEA collected potentially dangerous expired, unused, and unwanted prescription drugs for destruction at sites nationwide. This initiative addressed a vital public safety and public health issue. Many Americans were not aware that medicines languishing in home cabinets were highly susceptible to diversion and misuse. Rates of prescription drug misuse in the United States were increasing at alarming rates, as were

the number of accidental poisonings and overdoses due to these drugs. Studies showed that most misused prescription drugs were obtained from family and friends, including from the home medicine cabinet. In addition, many Americans did not know how to properly dispose of their unused medicine, often flushing them down the toilet or throwing them away—both potential safety and health hazards.

Less than a month into the DEA prescription drug take back campaign, over 2,700 sites had joined the effort nationwide. That number grew to 5,300 sites for the second take back day in April 2011. Americans participating in DEA's previous take back days turned in nearly 1.6 million pounds—almost 774 tons—of prescription drugs. During this effort Congress passed the Safe and Secure Drug Disposal Act of 2010, which amends the CSA to allow people using controlled substance medications to dispose of them by delivering them to entities authorized by the Attorney General to accept them. The Act also allows the Attorney General to authorize long-term care facilities to dispose of their residents' controlled substances in certain instances.

On December 21, 2012, DEA published in the Federal Register its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for the Disposal of Controlled Substances, which became effective in 2014. The regulations seek to implement the Secure and Responsible Drug Disposal Act of 2010. It established requirements to govern the secure disposal of controlled substance medications by both DEA registrants and what the CSA refers to as “ultimate users” of these medications (patients and animals). The regulations expanded options available to collect these medications from ultimate users for the purpose of disposal, to include takeback events, mail-back programs, and collection box locations.

The regulations contain specific provisions that allow law enforcement agencies to voluntarily conduct take-back events, administer mail-back programs, and maintain collection boxes; allow authorized manufacturers, distributors, reverse distributors, and retail pharmacies to voluntarily administer mail-back programs and maintain collection boxes; and allow authorized retail pharmacies to voluntarily maintain collection boxes at long-term care facilities.

## Operation Snake Oil (2012)

On June 29, 2012, Vincent Colangelo, a Florida pill-mill ring leader convicted in an OCDETF/PTO investigation, dubbed Operation Snake Oil, was sentenced to 20 years in federal prison. Colangelo pled guilty to conspiracy to distribute and dispense oxycodone without a legitimate medical purpose and outside the scope of legitimate medical practice, money laundering, and filing a false federal income tax return. As part of his plea agreement, he forfeited five properties worth over \$2.5 million dollars, \$911,951 in U.S. currency from seven bank accounts and safe deposit boxes, and 52 luxury vehicles, jewelry, and vessels worth over \$6 million dollars.

This 33-month investigation revealed that Colangelo's DTO operated seven pain clinics and one pharmacy in South Florida, making approximately \$30,000 per day at each clinic. Between October 2008 and February 2011 these pill mills were responsible for prescribing or dispensing millions of dosage units of controlled substances to patients without legitimate medical need. Colangelo would advertise on Craigslist to recruit doctors who were willing to prescribe maximum amounts of oxycodone and Xanax to patients with minimal medical consultation. Colangelo's doctors often saw over 100 patients per day, and they were paid approximately \$75 per patient. Operation Snake Oil



Left to right: Miami FD SAC Mark Trouville, SA Jeff Womack, GS Jeannette Moran, SA Joseph Gill, and ASAC Kevin Stanfill pose with some of Colangelo's seized vehicles.



Flanked by two seized Lamborghinis, the Miami TDS Squad poses with some seized high value vehicles.

marks the first Miami Tactical Diversion Squad initiative to combat the prescription drug epidemic and the rise of rogue pain clinics in South Florida.

## Digging Up Drug Tunnels

In July 2012, agents from DEA's Yuma Resident Office executed a search warrant inside a one-story nondescript building in San Luis, Arizona. They discovered the U.S. entrance to a tunnel that stretched 240 yards underground to an ice plant across the border in Mexico. The tunnel's entrance was in a storage room hidden beneath a large water tank. From the floor, the tunnel plunged more than 55 feet into the ground. Its walls stood more than six feet high. The shaft of the passageway measured four feet wide at the San Luis entrance. The tunnel was equipped with lighting and a ventilation system.

When agents entered the San Luis business, it was empty and largely unfurnished. Found on the floor next to the tunnel entrance were numerous 55-gallon drums filled with dirt and soil excavated from the vertical shaft

as well as large plywood boxes believed to be used to cover the pallets of drums for later removal from the location. As DEA agents searched the business, the Mexican military made entry into the ice plant business across the border in San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora, where they located the tunnel's other entrance. Mexican authorities found numerous bags of dirt stacked to the ceiling in the room with the tunnel's entryway.

Since January 2012, DEA agents had been conducting surveillance on the business after observing possible suspicious activity that indicated the site was being used as a potential stash location. On July 6, 2012, agents learned that the Arizona Department of Public Safety had stopped a black Ford F-150 pick-up on Highway 95 on a traffic violation. Inside the bed of the truck, DPS officers discovered 39 pounds of methamphetamine. Information gleaned from the stop led the vehicle back to the business location in San Luis, Arizona. Agents obtained a search warrant to enter the business location and three suspects were taken into custody in connection with the tunnel. The San Luis



Cross-border tunnel discovered in San Luis, Arizona.



Entryway to the tunnel on the U.S. side.

passageway is the only known completed and fully operational smuggling tunnel ever uncovered in the Yuma, Arizona, area. Between 2002 and 2012, 89 cross-border tunnels were discovered in Arizona and 50 in California.

### Operation No Pain All Gain (2012)

In August 2012, special agents, task force officers, and diversion investigators from DEA's Detroit Field Division worked together to arrest Babubhai Patel, a criminal organization leader, and 25 other individuals. The effort dismantled Patel's pharmaceutical drug trafficking and health care fraud organization. For three years, Patel, a nonpracticing pharmacist,

operated a large-scale drug distribution and health care fraud network in Detroit, Michigan, that hid his ownership and control of 26 area pharmacies through the use of straw owners. Patel paid doctors to write prescriptions to patients with Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance without a legitimate medical purpose. The doctors then directed participating patients in the scheme to fill the prescriptions at one of Patel's many pharmacies where insurers received controlled medication and were billed for other non-controlled medications that were never dispensed.

The Patel organization was responsible for dispensing more than six million dosage units of opiate painkillers and depressants throughout southeast Michigan, as well as fraudulently billing \$37.7 million to Medicare and \$20.8 million fraudulently to Medicaid. In addition to the arrests, this 3-year SOD-supported PTO/OCDETF investigation, dubbed Operation No Pain All Gain, resulted in



the seizure of \$300,000 in U.S. currency, several firearms, and assets totaling \$4.1 million. Based on DEA intelligence, an additional \$2 million in assets was seized by FBI. Six pharmacies surrendered their DEA registrations as a result of the operation.

## High-Ranking Member of the Juárez Cartel Captured

On April 17, 2012, the Juárez Cartel suffered a significant blow to its leadership structure when Mexican federal police, aided by DEA, arrested Luis Guillermo Castillo-Rubio, AKA El Pariente, in Querétaro, Mexico. Castillo-Rubio was considered a close ally of Juárez Cartel head Vicente Carrillo-Fuentes and was allegedly responsible for overseeing the training of would-be assassins for the cartel's enforcement gangs, La Línea and the Barrio Aztecas.

At the time of his arrest, Castillo-Rubio was in charge of all Juárez Cartel activities in the state of Chihuahua and worked directly under organizational leader



Luis Guillermo "El Pariente" Castillo-Rubio.



DEA Administrator Michele M. Leonhart receiving the Order of Merit of Duarte, Sanchez, and Mella Grand Officer Award from Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernández-Reyna at the Presidential Palace on Friday, August 31, 2012. The award was presented to Administrator Leonhart for her effort and commitment to battling global drug trafficking and, in particular, the support and close working relationship that exists between the Dominican Republic DNCD and DEA's Caribbean Field Division's Santo Domingo Country Office.

Carrillo-Fuentes, who oversaw the cartel's daily operations, including the movement of drug shipments, acts of violence, official corruption, and financial activities. As one of the highest-ranking members of the Juárez Cartel captured, Castillo-Rubio's arrest represented a major blow to the organization.

## Synthetic Drug Takedown

In 2010, poison centers nationwide responded to about 3,200 calls related to synthetic cannabinoids and cathinones, colloquially known as Spice and bath salts. In 2011, that number jumped to more than 13,000 calls. Sixty

percent of the cases involved patients 25 and younger.

On July 26, 2012, agents from DEA's Phoenix Field Division along with various state and local law enforcement agencies executed 17 search warrants and seized more than more 4,000 pounds of synthetic drugs. This was the first-ever law enforcement action against the synthetic designer drug industry responsible for the production and sale of synthetic drugs that are often marketed as bath salts, Spice, incense, or plant food. More than \$3 million in assets were also seized.

More than 3,322 pounds of synthetic cannabinoids (K2, Spice), over 733 pounds of synthetic cathinones (bath salts), and the ingredients to produce an additional 300 pounds were seized. Over 239 pounds of suspected psilocybin mushrooms were also seized.

There was a growing use of, and interest in, synthetic cathinones (stimulants/hallucinogens). Marketed under names such as Ivory Wave, Purple Wave, Vanilla Sky, or Bliss, these products are comprised of a class of dangerous substances perceived to mimic cocaine, LSD, MDMA, and/or methamphetamine. People using them reported impaired perception, reduced motor control, disorientation, extreme paranoia, and violent episodes. The long-term physical and psychological effects of use are unknown but potentially severe.

These products became increasingly popular between 2010 and 2012, particularly among teens and young adults

and those who mistakenly believed they could bypass the drug testing protocols set up by employers and government agencies to protect public safety. They are sold at a variety of retail outlets, in head shops, and online. However, they have not been approved by FDA for human consumption or for medical use, and there is no oversight of the manufacturing process.

DEA used its emergency scheduling authority to combat both synthetic cathinones and synthetic cannabinoids by temporarily placing several of these dangerous chemicals into Schedule I of the CSA on March 1, 2011. Congress has also acted, permanently placing cannabimimetic agents, including 15 specific cannabimimetic agents by name, 2 synthetic cathinones by name, and 9 synthetic phenethylamines into Schedule I.

## Operation Pill Nation 2 (2012)

With the August 16, 2012, culmination of Operation Pill Nation 2, DEA announced that seven doctors, three clinic owners, and one of their relatives had been charged with racketeering and other criminal charges in South Florida. In addition, 7 vehicles and 11 weapons were seized. DEA began to investigate these individuals in August 2009 based on a complaint from a former employee who informed investigators that after he left the clinic's employment he was requested to retroactively sign a power of attorney granting the clinic's owners



Bath salts products sold as Amped Up. Containers of Spice labeled as "Mary Jane, Private Reserve."

authorization to sign his DEA Order Forms—forms that permit a doctor to order controlled substances. The former employee became suspicious when he did not recognize the DEA number on the “power of attorney,” which was presented for his signature. The investigation revealed that without authorization, one of the defendants had applied for a DEA registration number using the former employee’s personal identification. Another doctor paid for the application. Once approved and a DEA registration number assigned, the employer opened an account with a pharmaceutical wholesale company and ordered 13,400 oxycodone tablets for dispensing from the clinic.

Between April 2010 and July 2012, undercover agents visited the clinic on multiple occasions. Law enforcement received a total of 55 prescriptions for controlled substances, including oxycodone, and other non-controlled substances.

### Operation Log Jam (2012)

On July 26, 2012, DEA announced the culmination of Operation Log Jam, resulting in more than 90 arrests and the seizure of more than 5 million packets of designer synthetic drugs and \$36 million in cash. This multiagency operation involved state and local law enforcement in more than 109 U.S. cities. Log Jam targeted every level of the synthetic designer drug industry, including retailers, wholesalers, and manufacturers.

DEA Administrator Leonhart remarked, “Although tremendous progress has been made in legislating and scheduling these dangerous substances, this enforcement action has disrupted the entire illegal industry, from manufacturers to retailers. Together with our federal, state, and local law enforcement partners, we are committed to targeting these new and emerging drugs with every scientific, legislative, and investigative tool at our disposal.”

### Operation Adam Bomb (2012)

On April 16, 2012, DEA announced the culmination of Operation Adam Bomb, a multinational operation that resulted in the arrest of eight people who all faced federal drug trafficking and money laundering charges due to their creation and operation of a “secret” online

narcotics marketplace known as The Farmer’s Market. The scheme sold a variety of controlled substances to approximately 3,000 customers in 34 countries and 50 states. Also arrested were seven other individuals associated with the online market. At the time of their arrest, law enforcement seized hashish, LSD, MDMA, an indoor psychotropic mushroom grow, and three indoor marijuana grows.

The 12-count indictment charged that each of the defendants was a member of a conspiracy to distribute a variety of controlled substances worldwide through the use of online marketplaces that allowed independent sources of supply to anonymously advertise illegal drugs for sale to the public. Operators of the online marketplaces provided a controlled substances storefront, order forms, online forums, customer service, and payment methods for different supply sources. These marketplaces had multiple supply sources offering various controlled substances, including LSD, MDMA, fentanyl, mescaline, ketamine, DMT, and marijuana. Between January 2007 and October 2009 alone, two defendants processed approximately 5,256 online orders for controlled substances valued at approximately \$1,041,244 via the online marketplaces.

### Project Below the Beltway (2012)

The December 6, 2012, culmination of Project Below the Beltway, a two-year series of investigations that targeted the Sinaloa Cartel, the Juárez Cartel, and other violent street gangs, was part of an ongoing initiative against the cartels and their U.S. distribution network. These cartels are believed to be responsible for laundering millions of dollars in criminal proceeds from illegal drug trafficking activities.

Project Below the Beltway was comprised of investigations in 79 U.S. cities and several foreign cities within Central America, Europe, Mexico, South America, and elsewhere. The investigation resulted in 3,780 arrests and the seizure of 6,100 kilograms of cocaine, 10,284 pounds of methamphetamine, 1,619 pounds of heroin, 349,304 pounds of marijuana, \$148 million dollars in U.S. currency, and \$38 million dollars in other assets.